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Oral History Collection

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Dieckman, Vivian, Alice French and Cindy French

October 9, 1990

Interviewed by Irene Francis

IF: ...for the Humanities Project called "Wet Mountain Valley, a gold mine of history.' We are in the home of Vivian Taylor Dieckman at a ranch on Willow Lane in Westcliffe, CO. The date is October 9, 1990. I am the interviewer and my name is Irene Francis. I'm going to ask Vivian some questions about how she came to this area and how the Dieckman's came to this area. Vivian, when did you come to the area of the Wet Mountain Valley?

VD: It was September 15, 1935, I believe.

IF: And what were your reasons for coming to this area?

VD: I came to teach school at the Willows school.

IF: Did you apply for a job and-

VD: Yes, I had a, oh what, I can't even think of the name, where, you know-

IF: Apply?

VD: Or apply for jobs, and I applied for a teaching job.

IF: Uh huh.

VD: And I got this job down here. I'd never heard of the place.

IF: You never heard of Westcliffe?

VD: Never heard of Westcliffe.

IF: And where were you living, Vivian? What was the area you were living in?

VD: I was living in Boulder then. I graduated from Teachers College, at that time, they called it, in Greeley.

IF: And was that a four-year college in Greeley?

VD: Yes, it was a four-year college. It's Northern Colorado, I believe now.

IF: And where did you live, where were you born?

VD: I was born in Louisville, CO, 13 miles from Boulder, 20 miles from Denver.

IF: And for the rest of Vivian's genealogy, please see the file on genealogy, those who are listening to this tape. So, you came to the Wet Mountain Valley as a teacher. Was Willows school a one room schoolhouse?

VD: Yes.

IF: From 1st grade till 8th grade?

VD: 1st through 8th. I think I had 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 8th. I think that was all. I had nine pupils all together.

IF: Do you know, do you remember any of their names?

VD: Well, in the 1st grade, there was Charles Cook. He lived down there, and Dorothy Jo Blythe. She's dead now. And then, the 2nd grade, there were Will Shalls. They moved away, the brother and sister. Then there was two Kastenicks, a boy and a girl. I can't remember their names. Clifford was the boy and they belonged to August Kastenicks, brother of Henry's. And they moved away from here, I think, in, after they finished 6th and 7th grades or something like that. And then there was Margaret Wilshow, I think her name was. She was in 8th grade. She is dead now and she belonged to, they lived right down there where, across from Leroy Rusher's, that house that's gone now. And I think that was all I had.

AF: Chuck Kastenick?

VD: Chuck Kastenick, didn't I? Oh no, I didn't. Chuck Kastenick was the 6th grade.

IF: Where did you live when you-

VD: I lived there where Leroy Rusher lived for the first month.

IF: And who had that house?

VD: Louis Frank, Terry's uncle and his wife.

IF: Brandt, the last name?

VD: And I rented, Frank, boarded from them, Frank. And she taught at the same time, she was teaching at the adobe schoolhouse. And then I moved up to Walker's, Hazel Walker's folks.

IF: I see.

VD: And I stayed there the rest of that year.

IF: Now, did you have to pay room and board when you lived in these houses?

VD: What?

IF: Did you have to pay room and board?

VD: Yes. \$20 a month.

IF: For room and board, and do you remember how much you got paid as a teacher?

VD: \$75 a month for every month but the last month and I didn't get paid for that month. The minimum wage at that time was \$75 and so, I didn't get paid the last month.

IF: Who was the superintendent when you were-

VD: Frances Kettle was the county superintendent then.

IF: Now, did you meet your husband when you came here? Did you know him before?

VD: No.

IF: How did you meet?

VD: He came down to his uncle's the first night I got in, down here.

IF: First night!

VD: The first night.

IF: Uh huh, and so did you see each other after that?

VD: Yes, we used to go together and he came over, he'd come over to Walker's. He knew them.

IF: When you were courting, what kind of places did you go to? Do you remember any of the dances or parties that they had around here?

VD: Just one chivarie dance and that was about all. There weren't many others around.

IF: Tell me about a chivarie dance. What's a chivarie dance?

VD: Well, a chivarie, it's just a dance that was given before his cousin was married.

IF: So, it's given for the couple. Did the couple give the chivarie dance, those that got married.

VD: The folks gave it.

IF: So, it was kind of like a reception kind of thing.

VD: They just had a dance.

IF: Who would play for the dances, do you remember anybody playing?

VD: I don't know who played for theirs. I know the Miller brothers played for ours.

IF: Uh huh.

VD: But I don't know who-

IF: When you got married, the Miller brothers.

VD: We were married one week and we gave the dance the next weekend.

IF: Where did you give your dance?

VD: At, well, it was up over Canda's store then. It's Grandma's House now. They had a dance hall up over the store, and that's where we had, we started out down here at the Willows schoolhouse and it was just too crowded, nobody could even move.

IF: So, everybody packed up and went there.

VD: So, we just moved into town.

IF: Uh huh.

VD: And they said that when the first car hit town, the last car hadn't left the schoolhouse yet.

IF: That many people!

VD: If you want to know about that, ask Marie Erps. She knows all about that.

IF: Uh huh. She had fun that night is what you're telling me.

VD: Supposed to have been the largest chivarie dance in the Valley that was ever held here.

IF: Now, where were, what year were you married in?

VD: 1936.

IF: And what was the whole date of your, when you got married? Your date?

VD: April 25, 1936 we were married.

IF: Ok.

VD: School was out the 24th. We were married the next day.

IF: Was there some reason you had to wait until school was out?

VD: No.

IF: I mean, there wasn't any rule that a teacher couldn't get married?

VD: No, we just decided to wait.

IF: For vacation. Did you go on a honeymoon?

VD: No.

IF: Did you just move right into-

VD: Into the house here.

IF: And where was Frank living? In this house? Harry?

VD: He lived in this house with his mother-

IF: Uh huh.

VD: And then she took part of the back part of the house.

IF: His mother was-

VD: We had this part.

IF: He was living here with his mother?

VD: Mm hmm.

IF: Tell me something about the Dieckman family. How did they come to this area?

VD: I don't, they just came, let's see, his mother's family lived here and his dad came here because Henry, his brother, was here. We don't know much about his dad's side of the family, about his dad. He never told much about him, his business. But his mother's folks, I don't know why they came here, but the Franks lived here and there were, the dad died here and the mother raised the children.

IF: His mother's maiden name was Frank.

VD: His mother's maiden name was-

IF: Frank.

VD: Sophia, wasn't it?

IF: So, her first name was Sophie?

VD: Mm hmm.

IF: Frank.

VD: His grandmother's, his mother's mother.

IF: mm hmm.

VD: And his mother's dad was, can you remember?

IF: Did the Deckman's homestead here?

VD: No, he bought this place. They bought Ed's place. They lived up there where Menzel lived.

IF: Up near Horn Creek?

VD: Yes. Up right next to their place.

IF: uh huh.

VD: And then when he was doing a half, they moved here to this ranch.

IF: And bought it.
 VD: And bought this place.
 IF: And so, Harry was a rancher when you married him.
 VD: He ranched all his life, and then he worked for the Forest Service in the summers, worked on all these trails here.
 IF: The Rainbow Trail, did he work-
 VD: Mm hmm.
 IF: How many years did he work, so was he called a forester, is that what he was?
 VD: I suppose that.
 IF: Or he worked for them.
 VD: And a rancher.
 IF: So right after you got married and you quit school and you became a ranch wife and you raised three children.
 VD: Yes.
 IF: Tell me something about ranch life. Did you like ranch life? Did you like being a rancher's wife?
 VD: Oh, yes, I didn't do much ranch work.
 IF: Did you do a lot of cooking for the hands?
 VD: I cooked for the hayman and anybody who came.
 IF: Did they come with their equipment to put up hay? Did you have your own equipment?
 VD: We had our own equipment. We used the horses mostly. When I first came, everything was horse and we stacked the hay.
 IF: And so, we have Alice French with us here today and who is the daughter. You are the ranch lady today.
 AF: Mm hmm. Pretty much.
 IF: How many acres do you ranch?
 AF: There's 160 acres here.
 IF: And how many cattle do you have?
 AF: We have about 46 head.
 IF: And do you have your own bull or do you?
 AF: Right, we have our own bull. Cap belonged to my brother, my sister and I and my mom still has a few, so the four of us have the cattle.
 IF: And do you do your haying too?
 AF: I didn't do any this year but I usually do, yes.
 IF: Do you have somebody come in and do the haying or do you do it?
 AF: We did this year and somebody helped us last year.
 IF: How much hay do you put up?
 AF: We put up, oh, I don't really know.
 IF: Depends on the season, huh?
 AF: Right.
 VD: 100 ton.
 AF: Maybe, 80 to 100 ton, probably.
 IF: Cindy, you want to ask your grandma anything about times?
 CF: Grandma, before you had electricity, what did you do with all your perishables? Your meats and stuff.
 VD: I canned some of it and we just bought at the store. I had a refrigerator, an icebox they called it first, with a block of ice in there.
 CF: Where would you get your ice?
 VD: In town at the, it was called The Creamery then, the milk products, I think now. But-
 IIF: Do you remember where they would get their ice?

VD: Some of the farmers put up their own, but we bought ours in there. I don't know where they got it.

IF: So, you'd have to go in town with a wagon?

VD: Mm hmm.

IF: And bring your ice out.

VD: Bring it out here and put it in the icebox.

IF: How often would you go into town? Talking about Westcliffe.

VD: I don't know how often we went in (laughing)

IF: I mean, like once a week or-

VD: Oh, maybe, maybe oftener.

IF: Oftener. Would you go down to Pueblo or Canon very much?

VD: Oh, quite a bit to Canon, not, we didn't go to Pueblo much then. We never went to Pueblo much.

IF: Did you ever ride the train that came in here?

VD: Oh, yes.

IF: Would you take that to-

VD: I rode the train, oh, before Margie was born, and then I'd just take the kids with me, go up about once a year for a while and then-

IF: Now, that would go to-

VD: We'd go to Denver, from Canon into Denver. There was a train from Westcliffe to-

IF: Texas Creek?

VD: Texas Creek when I came down here, and then it went out, not that year I guess but maybe it was that year.

IF: Would you have to go from Canon to Pueblo to Denver?

VD: Mm hmm.

IF: Was that the route?

VD: It went through Pueblo and the train went directly to Denver from Canon.

IF: From Canon.

VD: Oh, sometimes, we took it at Texas Creek. We caught the train there and went from there directly to Denver, and then, my folks would meet us in Denver, my mother and my sister and take us on to Boulder and Cheyenne.

IF: Where did your children go to school?

VD: For a while, they went down here to the little Willows school and then, what grade were you when you went-

AF: I was starting in 3rd grade when they consolidated the schools and we moved to town.

IF: Who was your teacher in Willows school?

AF: Laura Lange. She was my 1st and 2nd grade teacher. My sister went to Willows school for four years. She would have been in the 5th grade when they consolidated schools.

IF: Did they have a bus that came out and got you when they consolidated school.

AF: Mm hmm. They started with a bicycle stand.

IF: But before then, how did you get to school?

AF: We walked or Dad used to take us. Mom would take us in the car when the roads were good if we didn't walk, and when it was real stormy, Dad would come and get us sometimes in an old spring wagon with a team of horses.

IF: And Alice, you were born here in this house.

AF: Right.

IF: Vivian, who was the doctor that delivered, or did you have a doctor?

AF: Was it Bargol?

VD: Bardlow. Dr. Bardlow was my doctor when Alice was born.

IF: And did you have phones then?

AF: No, no telephone.

IF: How did you get hold of the doctor?

VD: I think Geneva Hunt was helping me then and her son and daughter came and I think he went for the doctor.

IF: Before you had electricity, what year did you get electricity in here, do you remember?

VD: Oh, I can't remember what year it was. It was the year after it came in, the REA came in. I don't remember what year it was but we didn't get it the first year but we did the second year.

IF: Did you have kerosene lamps here then?

AF: Mm hmm. Coal oil lamps.

IF: Do you remember that Alice?

AF: Oh sure! Sure, I remember that.

IF: So, was that before the schools consolidated?

AF: I don't remember. Would it be like 1949 or something?

VD: 1951 or 2.

IF: You haven't heard from anyone when the REA came in?

AF: You could probably look that up.

VD: Yeah, uh huh. I know it was the year after, we didn't get it the first year, but the second year, I think it was that after it came in.

AF: And then, the telephone we didn't get until-

IF: Did they run their lines?

VD: I don't remember when we got the phone.

IF: Did you have to run your lines for the phone? Cause I know some of the people did.

AF: What do you mean by-

IF: I mean, did you have to put up your own poles and run your lines?

AF: No, they did it. They put them up for you.

IF: They put them up for you, cause I know on the other side of the valley one time when I was interviewing Stella Smith, they brought that in there, their own lines and then they connected it up for them. Cindy, do you want to ask her something else?

CF: Do you remember the Depression?

AF: The Depression, Mom.

IF: When they had the Depression? Was it a real hardship on the people of this area?

VD: Well, I don't believe it affected us too much that I remember.

AF: Talk to my mother. We've never had a great deal at any times. But the Depression didn't make that much difference. (laughing)

IF: I ask that question of my aunt and I get the same answer.

AF: Same answer.

UI: Well, they all seem to say they have something to eat-

AF: Right.

UI: Made their own clothes. One question I'd like to-why your subject of, what do you think of busses today, was that-

AF: It was a real school bus, a real school bus, and I remember how horrible it was. I was such a timid girl and the school, we, you know, rode in with my sister and all the kids that I'd gone to school with but they went on to Silver Cliff and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade went to school in the little old schoolhouse, you know, that you've renovated.

IF: Uh huh.

AF: And that was so horrible because, you know, to have to get off of that school bus, and they all went on, you know, and I didn't know anyone or, you know, it was really hard. I remember that.

IF: Who was your teacher there?

AF: My teacher, I can't remember, can't remember who my 3rd grade teacher was.

IF: Betty Munson wasn't teaching then.

AF: No, she got my brother but, I can't remember.

IF: Or Helen Hinn?

AF: Mm mm. No.

VD: [unintelligible]

AF: Mrs. Riggs was in that, Dan Rigg's first wife was one of the teachers there but I heard she taught the 1st grade. I just don't remember.

IF: Uh huh. And you got off there and you were just kind of lost?

AF: Uh huh.

IF: Everybody else kept going.

AF: Uh huh.

IF: Did the teacher realize that, that you were so timid?

AF: I don't know.

Tape stops and restarts.

AF: Was down kind of in a saddle.

IF: That used to, it's like a foundation.

AF: Yeah.

IF: Of it.

AF: It was still there at that time.

IF: What do you think about that Maltese cross on there? Do you think it's real old?

AF: Oh, yeah. I think it's real old, yeah.

IF: Think it's the stories about the Spaniards who-

AF: Sure, I think there's, you know, there's something to it. Those stories have been here for a long long time. I, a friend of mine was with the group that found the chain and the skeleton and, you know, I know he wouldn't make up a story, you know. I'm sure that was true. My uncle Joe-

IF: No, what you said what happened to the chain and the skeleton?

AF: I have no idea. Have no idea at all.

IF: You uncle Joe what?

AF: My uncle Joe did quite a bit of exploring up there, it seems. There was a group that went down on a rope for quite a ways and then there's this story, you know, about the, the Spanish lady, I believe she was, or Indian lady, I'm not sure which who chewed the blanket down wrapped around a rock and then the blanket blew back up and, you know, I've heard that story from the time I was a tiny little child.

IF: Well, I could see where that would happen because just standing in front of it, there's a lot of wind comes out of there and it's coming from somewhere, and you just don't realize where this volume of wind comes from. You've both been out here a long time. Have you ever gone out there to the Silver Cliff cemetery and saw those lights?

AF: We've been out a few times, uh huh.

IF: Have you seen anything?

AF: Yes, when the lights kind of resurfaced, I guess you'd say, my sister was a senior in high school and a bunch of the kids were out, messing around, and they'd gone up on a hill and they saw those lights, and that's kind of what, you know, they've been seen a long time ago in the cemetery, right, but nobody had said or done anything about them for years, you know, and they'd kind of been sort of forgotten about. They went out there and saw the lights then and got everybody all excited and at that time then, there was a lot of uranium mining going on in this area and exploring in all the mountains and everything, so some geologists took a black light out there and we went with them at the time. I can remember going out there when they blacked the lights out, you know, which everybody knows that story. They blacked the lights out and they took-

IF: Where? They blacked lights out in-

AF: In Westcliffe and Silver Cliff.

IF: Westcliffe and Silver Cliff? Or is there-

AF: And they took a black light, I think it's called out, you know, to shine on it to try to figure out what it was.

IF: Could they find anything? Did they shine this black light on the stones?

AF: On the shiny lights, you know, the lights would flicker like they do and then they'd put a black light on it, trying to figure out what it was, but I don't think that they, you know, ever figured out anything.

IF: And you were out there with them when they did that?

AF: You went out too, didn't you?

VD: Uh huh.

IF: I was out there about three weeks ago, sat there, and all that I could see, cause there was the lights from Westcliffe, and all I could see was like red and green lights, but they were definitely shining off-

AF: Reflections.

IF: Which were marble tombstones which were not there when people in the 1800s saw these lights.

AF: Mm hmm.

IF: So, what I say, I'm sure, was not what these other people saw. Is it look like, tell me what it looked, does it look like a light or a gas or a-

AF: Oh, I don't remember exactly what it looks like really, you know.

IF: Did it frighten you?

VD: Frighten us-

AF: Oh, there was a lot of people out there, so no, I don't-

IF: You weren't frightened.

AF: Uh uh, no.

IF: Would they be there if you'd walk right up to them?

AF: I don't remember, Irene, to say. My sister works with social services in Pueblo and she works with the elderly and she, one of her people that she went to was an old lady who kind of dealt with the occult and things like that and she would always tell my sister that those were spirits and they were bad spirits, and that people should leave them alone, you know, and my sister would never go out after that. She'd go as far as the road, but she'd never walk out in the cemetery.

IF: I'm asking all this because there was, I know there was a man in Westcliffe that called my house last week and wanted to know the information on it and of course, we knew the one that the National Geographic blurb that they put out. So, I'm asking different people if they have seen this. But your sister was one that went out there. It was a bunch of young people.

AF: Uh huh. They were 18, you know, high school graduates.

IF: Yeah, just kind of goofing around out there like they do, huh?

AF: So, that would have been in 1956 and as you know, we all know they've been seen way back.

IF: Oh right!

AF: But they'd kind, nobody paid any attention, haven't for years I don't think, and then, they kind of stirred it all up again.

IF: We're going to talk a little bit about some of the different predators that are around on the ranch. Do you remember any stories or any dealing with the skunks on your place here?

AF: With skunks, Mom, and all the problems we've had with that.

VD: The dogs and the cats and you.

IF: (laughing) Is that true, if you pour tomato juice all over what it is that gets sprayed that it takes it away?

VD: I don't know, that's what I've heard, but-

IF: What do you do?

VD: We never did anything.

AF: We never did anything. Our biggest problem was that the skunks would get under the house and then something would scare them or make them mad and then, they'd spray, and the whole house would smell, you know. We have a remedy for that now. We don't have any more skunks. My dog there is a skunk killer. He used to play with them all the time and he found out that he got in severe trouble when he would come back when his friends would spray and he got in really big trouble for it. So, he got, finally figured out what the trouble was coming from, so he killed every skunk he ever sees. He has a special skunk bark. I always know when he's after a skunk and of course, he kills them and then he comes in with skunk spray. So, we're not totally free of spray but we don't have any skunks anymore at all.

IF: Oh! Cats keep, they don't keep skunks away.

AF: No, no, I don't-

VD: Your dad used to track them.

AF: Yes, uh huh.

VD: He tracked the coyotes and-

AF: My dad tracked for years. He was a tracker and he would-

IF: How about mountain cats?

VD: All these. He and John Canute, I don't know how many they killed that one year.

IF: Would he sell them? He would sell the skins?

VD: He wouldn't skin them.

AF: Not skunks, but he trapped and sold furs. The bobcat, actually that's old. I forget if that's a bobcat or a lynx cat. I think it is a bobcat. The kids' dad gave them that. That one came from Gunnison.

VD: And he killed coyotes.

AF: Cats-

VD: An awful lot of those cats.

IF: Mountain lions?

AF: No, lynx cats.

IF: Oh, lynx cats!

AF: Lynx cats, uh huh.

IF: Do you have any bear around here?

AF: What? Bear?

VD: Not in traps.

AF: And we haven't ever had any bear down around the ranch here that I can remember of, but my dad shot a bear one time. During bear season, used to be years ago, when you bought a deer license, you automatically got a bear license at the same time. So, my dad had gone hunting with some hunters and had shot at a bear, hit the bear, and the bear came back towards him, and he just killed the bear, just as it was charging him and that bear, they set it in and they had like a Boone and Crockett at that time and dad's bear was killed in the first of the season and another fellow from the Gunnison country killed a bear right at the very end of the season, which means Dad's had shrank and he missed having the biggest, largest bear of the year.

IF: What do you mean, Boone and Crockett?

AF: Boone and Crockett is a measurement that's done for deer and elk. It's measured on their horns, bear on the size of the skin and it's just as to who got the largest animal, you know, and it's on record.

IF: I want to ask one more thing before we finish. I'm going to ask this of Alice. Do you, were you, when you were young in school, did you, were you in 4H very much? Did you raise animals?

AF: No.

IF: That was not a strong-

AF: No, we didn't get to be in anything like that. I don't know, I really don't know how strong the 4H was

because we just didn't have ways to go. We pretty much stayed home. We're very much, our entertainment, our things were here. We'd come home, catch our horses and ride over to the neighbors, you know, or we'd meet and we'd ride around for an hour or so, you know, and that was our entertainment. We didn't go very much at all. So, when my children got into 4H, then I really enjoyed it, the two of them. But as far as things that we did, we didn't go very much at all.

VD: Not much at all. Not much to hear about 4H then.

AF: Going to a movie, I think, was one of the really big-

IF: Where would you go to a movie?

AF: In town at the movie theater.

IF: Was that the Jones Theater?

AF: It was the Canda Theater at that time. Yeah, wasn't it?

VD: Uh huh.

IF: And would you all, all the teens would go and the family would go and-

AF: Mom would, you always liked to go.

VD: Yes, uh huh.

IF: Well, we really thank you for telling us all about your life on the ranch and I'm sure it'll benefit a lot of young people as they come along.

AF: Thank you.

End of recording.

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